



File Code: 1950

Date: April 2, 2019

Dear Interested Citizen,

The USDA Forest Service, is seeking comments in regards to a Draft Decision Memo for the Eastern Divide Highlands Prescribed Fire Project. This proposal concerns the restoration of fire-adapted forests and community protection in the Eastern Divide Highlands. The project area includes the counties of Botetourt, Craig, Roanoke, Giles, Bland, Pulaski, Wythe, Tazewell, and Montgomery in Virginia. A vicinity map and individual proposed burn area maps are posted on the project website <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=51669>.

We anticipate this proposal to be categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) under 36 CFR 220.6(e):

- (6) *Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities that do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than 1 mile of low standard road construction.*

Due to high public interest in this project, we are taking the unusual step of soliciting comments on a draft of the decision; this is in no way meant to set a precedent on future public input for categorically excluded projects. However, we will continue to offer public involvement opportunities for these projects and will take public comments into consideration before final decisions are made. As a result of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014 (Public Law No. 113-76) and the Agricultural Act of 2014 (Farm Bill, Public Law No. 102-381), the Forest Service will no longer offer appeal opportunities for categorically excluded projects.

Comments received, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, anonymous comments will not provide the agency with the ability to provide the respondent with subsequent environmental documents. Please provide your comments by or within 45 days of the date of this letter.

Please be specific in your comments and how they relate to the enclosed draft proposal. Comments received will be used by the Forest Service to inform the final decision.

A final decision on this project is expected in June. The final Decision Memo and the associated documentation will be posted on the project website <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=51669>. Please indicate in your comments if you would like to be notified when it is available.

Comments may be submitted electronically, in a common digital format, to easterndivide@fs.fed.us. Or on the project webpage at <https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public/CommentInput?Project=51669>. When sending electronic comments, please note the name of the project in the subject line of the electronic mailing.



Hand-delivered comments must be received within our normal business hours between 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. and 1:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. Comments may be mailed to Dan McKeague, District Ranger, Eastern Divide Ranger District, 110 Southpark Drive, Blacksburg, VA 24060.

In addition, there will be a public open house to discuss this project on May 8, 2019, at the Eastern Divide District office in Blacksburg. It will start at 4:00 p.m. and run until 7:00 p.m. If you need additional information about this project, please contact Jesse Overcash, District Wildlife Biologist, at telephone 540-552-4641.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'D. McKeague', is written over a faint circular stamp.

DANIEL W. MCKEAGUE
District Ranger